



Newsletter
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THE FORTNIGHTLY DELIGHTFULLY BRIEF, PITHY AND WHOLLY IDIOSYNCRATIC NEWSLETTER.



Delightfully Brief

The current *cause de jour* is ECDIS. While there are a few Cartesian self-evident truths – apparently believed by some with sufficient power to bring the concept to its current state – there have been no valid, reliable, empirical and rigorous investigations into the question of ECDIS improving marine safety. Neither has the question of whether or not ECDIS will create more problems than it has been designed to cure been answered. Until such demonstrations are forthcoming, a wary marine industry at sea – and ashore outside the accounting department – is resigned to another

push to make ships more aeroplane-like. The cycle has played before and usually with not good results. Ships are not aircraft and masters and officers of ships are not jet-jockeys. Full disclosure: I fly a piston-engine airplane with electronic navigation systems and have had occasion to compare that machine with its systems to ships and marine ECDIS. We will see as ECDIS grinds along. The airplane navigational systems are simplistic in thought and concept and do not deal – nor do they have to deal – with the many larger number of variables and forces found at sea.

Pithy

Descartes contemplated his navel and proudly asserted that the fundamental self-evident truth was that he thought and therefore he existed. Not so fast. Others including Newton, and Hume said "show me." That means that self-evident truths are not good enough. A good deal of modern technology is marketed on the Sony model of creating

In This Issue

- Help or Hindrance:
- ECDIS In Charge?
- ECDIS: The Demand or The Supply?
- Urgings

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a product which does something and then convincing buyers that they cannot possibly live without it. These are technological fixes looking for a problem. Consider cellular telephones which have been shown to create many problems, some fatal. ECDIS shares some of these characteristics. Just as the paperless office of two decades ago was thought to be possible, one suspects the notion of a chartless ship will not be reached any time soon even with IMO mandates. ECDIS is founded on self-evident truths which have a way of failing. Empirical demonstrations of the utility of a system or systems tend to be more flexible. Will ECDIS be abandoned? Probably not. Will there be growing pains? They have already started. Will ECDIS become as radar – which has reached a point that the law governing it seems quaint until it ensnares a mariner. Likely. Will the courts be involved? A lot. Will ECDIS make things safer for our ships and people and cargo and environment? Marginally -- and if and only if it is trained properly and standardized properly and used properly and monitored and managed properly with all these systems integrated properly – a tall order indeed in an industry doing what we do for at least five millennia. Is the benefit to cost ratio for ECDIS compelling? Not yet and it may not be in the future. People are not electrons or pixels and they do not behave in their social systems as predictably as our techno-brethren would like them to behave. Therein will be the core problem with ECDIS. ECDIS should work for us and not the other way around.

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Wholly Idiosyncratic

Lest you think the above is a Luddite anti-technical ramble, it is not. However, one can readily see that the call for ECDIS has been manufacturer-driven and not customer demanded outside a small group of the technosapients. I had recent occasion to deal with one of the larger American producers of such systems and found the conversations to be mind-numbing in lack of clarity, unfocused on the part of the vendor and managed dysfunctionally to my utter exasperation. Others with whom I have talked have reported similar experiences. One asked me: "Why are we required to understand them when they do not listen or communicate with us?" A good question and one worthy of pondering.

Urgings

FOB again. Why used LinkedIn with its tens of thousands of groups wherein one is limited to fifty? FOB is focused, maritime and useful. Try it out at [The FOB Network](#).

Look at the April 2012 version of IHS *Solutions* published by *Fairplay* for a good and thoughtful review of ECDIS and its problems.

Smooth sailing, fair winds and a following sea.

John A. C. Cartner
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The Cartner Cos., consults in maritime and related law, naval architecture and marine engineering and maritime economics and trade.

From the archives: Do you really want to know where PCB's are found on older ships? One of our clients had such a burning need so we surveyed nine sisterships of earlier vintage. The surprise? The most concentrated PCB's were found in the two-sided sticky tape used to mount placards. What did this mean? We had no idea then and have none now. However, if you have a similar strong need, let us know and we have likely done something similar to it.

Notice of Retraction: 15 April 2012 Newsletter, Pithy; shipmaster is Bulgarian, not Ukrainian as previously stated.

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